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SUBJECT: GEORGIA: AMBASSADOR FRIED DISCUSSES GEORGIAN
ACCEPTANCE OF GUANTANAMO DETAINEES

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Kent D. Logsdon for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: During his August 5-6 visit to Tbilisi, Special Envoy for Guantanamo Bay Ambassador Daniel Fried discussed with a wide-range of Senior Georgian officials the details of how Georgia planned to implement its offer to accept a number of detainees currently detained at Guantanamo Bay who have been approved for transfer to a third country. In each meeting, the Georgian government response was one of openness and availability to assist the U.S. in closing Guantanamo through the placement of specific detainees into Georgia. Logistical details remain; however, it is clear that Georgia is prepared to accept at least some of the seven candidates presented to them during the Special Envoy's visit and expects to complete its review process and reach agreement on transfer by the end of September. While in Tbilisi, Ambassador Fried met with Minister of Foreign Affairs Grigol Vashadze, Secretary of the National Security Council Eka Tkeshelashvili, Minister of Internal Affairs Vano Merabishvili (whose ministry is in the lead on this issue), and Minister of Defense David Sikharulidze. END SUMMARY

Meeting with Foreign Minister Vashadze

¶2. (S) In a broad discussion Special Envoy Ambassador Fried provided an overview of the current situation at Guantanamo Bay, U.S. government attempts to move, resettle, and repatriate current detainees for whom continued detention is deemed unnecessary, and other countries, efforts to assist. In particular, Ambassador Fried focused on the efforts of European Union nations to accept detainees. Ambassador Fried stressed that UNHCR had concurred with U.S. efforts to resettle some detainees and noted the availability of a dedicated letter from UNHCR to the Georgian government. In an effort to allay concerns that Georgia would be isolated in its willingness to accept detainees, Ambassador Fried described the willingness of some European nations such as Portugal, Ireland, Spain and Belgium and Switzerland (the latter two countries want their offers to remain private for now), and stressed throughout the meeting that Georgia would count itself among many European nations should it choose to assist the United States in this matter. Ambassador Fried stated that the detainees being considered for resettlement to Georgia were Tunisians and Libyans, and he noted in the interest of full disclosure, that at least one had expressed interest in traveling to Chechnya at some point in the past.

¶3. (S) Foreign Minister Vashadze emphasized Georgia's willingness to assist the U.S. in this area, and noted that the Georgian government was prepared to accept detainees whenever the logistical details could be worked out between MOIA and the State Department. Specifically, he stated that Georgia would take nearly everybody requested. Vashadze strongly believed that openness with regard to the media was the best course of action, but deferred to the MOIA. The Foreign Minister stated that there was broad international support for closing Guantanamo, and thus no reason not to be open and public about the situation.

National Security Council Also Supportive

¶4. (S) In a lunch meeting with Secretary of the National Security Council Eka Tkeshelashvili, Ambassador Fried covered the same points as with the Foreign Minister, while also noting details of the background of the prospective detainees for Georgia and any potential security risks. Tkeshelashvili was pleased to hear that the plan was not to place the detainees in prison while in Georgia, and instead were recommended for release with necessary measures implemented by the internal security services. She assured Ambassador Fried that Georgia was quite capable and willing to handle any detainees which are chosen for resettlement in Georgia.

Meeting with Defense Minister Sikharulidze

¶5. (S) Ambassador Fried stressed to Defense Minister Sikharulidze the deep involvement of President Obama and Vice President Biden in the efforts to close Guantanamo. He appreciated the offer of MoIA Minister Vano Merabashvili two months ago, in which he proposed Georgia as a possible country for resettlement. Fried mentioned that seven detainee files were already at the MoIA and that he would cover the details with Minister Merabishvili. He stated that the proposed detainees are "not saints," but were low level fighters of Tunisian and Libyan origin. Fried further stated that if Georgia would prefer "a better group of detainees," they could consider the Uighurs, but that that could cause them trouble with China.

Merabishvili Ready to Move Quickly -- No to the Uighurs

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¶6. (S) In a meeting with Merabishvili, Fried thanked the MOIA for its willingness to accept some detainees and reiterated points he had made to the other ministers. Merabishvili asked what U.S. expectations were for the detainees and Fried explained that the United States did not expect them to remain in custody. Merabishvili said that it would be important to work closely with Minister of Corrections and Legal Assistance Dmitry Shashkin whose ministry is responsible for probation efforts. Merabishvili was concerned that problems securing Georgia's borders -- particularly those with the separatist regions -- could present an opportunity for escape. Fried told the Minister that the MOIA may want to initially implement strict guidelines on travel, as have other European countries prepared to accept detainees. Fried recommended that the MOIA plan to interview detainees in Guantanamo (which the USG would arrange) and Merabishvili agreed that he would send a team in early September. When asked about the need to provide a resettlement package for the detainees, Fried told the Minister that the United States has modest funding available to assist with the costs of resettling detainees. Merabishvili said that the Georgian government would be willing to provide an amount commensurate with state pensions, but it would be politically difficult to provide more to the detainees than to state pensioners.

¶7. (S) Head of the MoIA Analytical Department Shota Utiashvili asked if the detainees would apply for asylum in Georgia. Fried responded that the detainees would need a category for admittance under Georgian law. Fried told the minister that Uighurs would be an easier project for the MOIA but noted potential problems from the Chinese. Minister Merabishvili said that Georgia could not accept Uighurs -- China was too important to Georgia, particularly on issues related to Central Asia. Fried told the minister that the United States is seeking residences for the detainees with security services that are mature enough to handle them in a civilized way -- and he noted that at least one of the proposed detainees for Georgia had expressed a desire to visit Chechnya in the past. Fried said that we did not want to generate additional headaches for Georgia with Russia.

When asked whether the detainees home countries would accept them -- Ambassador Fried said that the Libyans have expressed no interest in their citizens return. Tunisia had expressed interest, but given their track record of poor treatment of previously-repatriated detainees, it is currently not an option for repatriation.

18. (S) On a way forward, Merabishvili said that his team would develop a list of questions regarding the proposed detainees which would be delivered through liaison channels. After receiving a response, MoIA would send a team to Washington and to Guantanamo Bay in early September to continue evaluating the detainees under consideration. The Minister expected to make final decisions by the end of September. Fried again expressed appreciation for Georgia's efforts to resettle detainees and acknowledged the possibility that those resettled could find a way to leave Georgia, though Georgia has the existing infrastructure to keep a close watch on the returned detainees which the U.S. expected Georgia would employ. Fried told Merabishvili he understood his position on the Uighurs.

19. (U) Ambassador Fried has cleared this cable.
LOGSDON